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Things I Gleaned from the Prism Pentad and other sources

*(This is the revealed canon, as I understand it—
if I'm wrong about something, please let me know!)*

VERDANT PASSAGE (PP1)

Sacha & Wyan— disembodied heads of the chieftains who helped Kalak conquer Tyr. Mention is made of accumulating treasure for a millennium

Beneath the city of Tyr are many pillars which support the city. Agis says that rumor/legend says the city was built on a swamp. Ktando, Sadira's teacher, says before the swamp was a sacred wood, where the temple of the Crimson God / Knights was the sacred center around which the city was built. The figure of 2,000 years is used to describe the time between the sacred wood and the present.

Tithian tells Sadira, Agis, and Rikus that the templars have been running Tyr for a thousand years.

In the insectoid metamorphosis that Kalak chooses to push himself toward Dragonhead, the larva ingests obsidian spheres

BLACK FLAMES adventure

Farcluun, "very old and powerful dragon"

Sielba of Yaramuke, a sorcerer-queen, defeated decisively by Hamanu (when?) Also take note of the Wall against Evil

Magic Mouth "Yaramuke, carved from barren wilderness by the hand of Emperor Kadiran a thousand generations ago . . . Prospered since the coming of the Empress Sielba.

IVORY TRIANGLE

Siemhouk, the child priest, a talented 14-year old who Nibenay hopes will prevent the bestial rages of emerging Dragonkind

CRIMSON LEGION (PP2)

Tower of Buryn: home to the dwarven kings for three thousand years.

Rkard, apparently a bearded dwarf, lead the dwarfs into the world, which was still verdant...

On the other hand, the Scourge of Rkard is the sword that killed him.

Belt of Rank, passed for three thousand years from one dwarven general to the next

Shadow-giant, Umbra— denizen of the Black, where obsidian is valued (particularly by wives at "egging" time (do halflings *normally* reproduce by "egging?")

Umbra refers to the Scourge as being made from Vorpall Steel. Encountering a wraith, he retreats

In a Citadel, Rikus encounters wraiths, the wraiths of knights who fought with Borys against the dwarves (?). These wraiths wait expectantly for the return of *Rajaat* and think that Rikus is Borys of Ebe, 13th champion of Rajaat, Dwarf-Butcher.

They say, to Borys: Die and join your followers as you should have done a thousand years ago

Rikus tells them that Kemelok (the city of dwarves — wherein lies the tower of Buryn?) has been buried for a thousand years, perhaps longer.

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Tithian reports that Borys cannot make him a sorcerer-king, even with the dark lens

Prodded by Wyan and Sacha, Tithian allows that he thinks Borys uses the slave levy to keep the shadow-folk imprisoned in the Black. S&W reply that Borys uses the levy to maintain the spells that keep Rajaat imprisoned

Sa'ram tells Tithian that he and Jo'orsh cannot avenge the dwarves by killing Borys, because if the dragon dies, Rajaat will be freed and the Cleansing Wars will resume

Tithian reasons that the Dark Lens was the means by which Rajaat controlled the transforming magic of the Pristine Tower

Before the Black is something called the Gray, where the spirits of Tithian's victims dwell and are able to call the dark lens (and Tithian with it) to them

Sacha remembers Rajaat using the lens to imbue him with the power of the Champions

Probing Wyan's mind, Agis finds the demise of the Pixies

CERULEAN STORM (PP5)

Outside the Black is barren wastes, inside is the Hollow, filled with a skeleton.

Rajaat calls Khidar, saying the sorcerer-kings must be near when the Usurper frees him; Khidar advises against it, saying the s-k's have grown stronger.

Rajaat reminds Khidar of what he has sacrificed to return the world to ``your people"

Borys suggests to Andropinis that ``spirit lords" will undo the magic protecting Sa'ram and Jo'orsh

Khidar, a shadow-*giant* is also a halfling.

Sadira can travel through the Gray

The ``blood" of the Scourge of Rkard causes transformation like the pools of the Pristine Tower

Said ``blood" transforms Caelum's hand, placing a mouth in the palm, a mouth which speaks with, possibly, Rajaat's voice.

Sadira battles Abalach-Re.

Rajaat is summoned out of the Scourge and confronts Abalach, aka Uyness of Waverly, Orc Plague, and slays her easily.

Borys says to Jo'orsh: after a thousand years you're going to let me have the lens.

Borys summons beings he calls his kaisharga (Spirit lords and denizens of Ur Draxa?)

Among the kaisharga: a Lord Mariner, a Lord Guardian, a Lord Harbinger, a Lord Warrior (all undead) also a Lord Vizier, Lady Bliss

Sacha says Rajaat created Hamanu as a sorcerer-king so Hamanu could kill Myron of Yoram

The sorcerer-kings do not enter the Black

When the Black-bleeding Scourge penetrates Borys's skin, Rajaat is able to claim vengeance against the chief of the rebellion

p275 Andropinis gives his version

Atoning for the mistake that ended the Blue Age, their Age, dying halflings give birth to the races Rajaat will

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Dregoth

“The Dread King Dregoth was killed almost 2,000 years ago by the combined powers of 7 sorcerer-kings. Shortly thereafter, Dregoth rose as the undead dragon king . . .

In life, Dregoth was a 29th level dragon on the verge of achieving the final stage of metamorphosis. He had been a champion of Rajaat the War-Bringer, a general in the devastating Cleansing Wars that laid waste to the world. When it became clear that the War-Bringer was going to betray his champions, Dregoth helped imprison Rajaat. Once Rajaat was safely locked away, Dregoth helped the other champions (now sorcerer-kings) turn Borys into the Dragon of Tyr to guard over the War-Bringer's prison.

Fearing that the inasanity that affected the transformed Borys would soon affect Dregoth (who was next in line of the remaining champions to become a full dragon), the sk-s decided to destroy the Dread King of Giustenal. They ambushed him in his own palace, battering him with the Way, pounding him spells and even striking him with weapons and fists. Dregoth fought as best he could, but the seven struck w/o warning. He died, and his city died with him

Dregoth has an especial hatred for Abalach-Re, whose hand it was that dispatched him to death and ultimately undeath.

Materials imply that Dregoth helped to transform Borys into the Dragon of Tyr (perhaps because he was already well verse in transformation magic?) and that afterward, during Borys' madness, seven (7) s-k (Abalach-Re, Nibenay, Hamanu, Kalak, Tec, Andropinis, Oba of Gulg) descended on Giustenal to destroy him.

Hamanu's take on this: By the time of Hamanu's transformation, Dregoth was already established in the giant's stronghold of Giustenal which he rarely left, despite persistent (and accurate) reports that he had not, in fact, completed his Cleansing campaign. Dregoth was already obsessed with his notion of true-godhood and there were signs of strains between Dregoth and Rajaat at the transformation, nonetheless, Hamanu turned to Borys rather than Dregoth because in Dregoth Hamanu saw another Myron of Yorum who was dangerously corrupted by the power given to him. (And also because it was apparent, by that point, that Dregoth had developed a hatred of untransformed humanity; Hamanu is very humanocentric.)

Regarding the destruction of Dregoth and Giustenal. It is possible that Abalach-Re lied— all Champions lie— but, for his own part he did not participate in the assassination because he feared Dregoth becoming a dragon. *He* went to Giustenal because he'd been convinced that Dregoth was trying to free Rajaat. Dregoth had never been completely on-board with Rajaat's imprisonment and his hatred of the Rebirth races had come to include humanity, albeit for different reasons and purposes than Rajaat espoused.

It had not occurred to Hamanu that an immortal champion would come back as an equally immortal undead champion—although he'd suppose that it should have. He suspects there was a lot more to the relationship between Dregoth and Abalach-Re than ever made the evening news.

Nonetheless, Abalach-Re was dead before Dregoth made his official reappearance, and by the reports Windreaver's been able to extract from the underground, things haven't gone well for him— although the sighting of another army of the undead is cause for considerable concern. (When they met to deal with Rajaat (and Sadira and the rest of the Cerulean Storm events) Nibenay passed word to Inenek and Hamanu that Dregoth had been playing with non-Athasian energies and races. Given Dregoth's known obsession with divinity, this wasn't terribly surprising. (Hamanu knows there are no and can be no gods on Athas) the thought that otherworldly energies could be brought into play is intriguing, but not enough to tempt any of the surviving Champions.)

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Concordance of cities, sorcerer-kings and Champions

	City	Sorcerer-king	Champion (?)	Number	aka	Cleansed
1.	Tyr	Kalak	non-champion			
2.	Nibenay	Nibenay	Bane of Gnomes		Gallard	Gnomes
3.	Gulg	Oba	<i>Ogre-Naught</i>		<i>Inenek</i>	<i>Ogres</i>
4.	Raam	Abalach-Re	Orc Plague		Uyness of Waverly	Orcs
5.	Urik	Hamanu	Troll Scorchers		Manu	Trolls
					Myron of Yoram	
6.	Ur Draxa	Borys	Dwarf Butcher	13th	Borys of Ebe	Dwarves
7.	Yaramuke	Sielba				<i>Sprites</i>
8.	Guistenal	Dregoth	Ravager of Giants	3rd		Giants
9.	<i>Kalidnay</i>		Curse of Kobolds		Sacha Arala	Kobolds
10.	<i>Bodach</i>		Pixie Blight		Wyan Bodach	Pixies
11.	Balic	Andropinis	Slayer of Elves	8th	Albeorn of Dunswich	Elves
12.	Draj	Tectuktitlay				<i>Goblins</i>
13.	<i>Waverly</i>			1st		<i>Centaurs</i>
14.	<i>(D)arkhold</i>			2nd		<i>Minotaurs</i>

The Calendar of Tyr (King's Age — Endlean & Seofan Cycles)

1.	Ral	Fury	67.	Ral	Slumber
2.	Friend	Contemplation	68.	Friend	Defiance
3.	Desert	Vengeance	69.	Desert	Reverence
4.	Priest	Slumber	70.	Priest	Agitation
5.	Wind	Defiance	71.	Wind	Fury
6.	Dragon	Reverence	72.	Dragon	Contemplation (176th KA: Manu born)
7.	Mountain	Agitation	73.	Mountain	Vengeance
8.	King	Fury	74.	King	Slumber
9.	Silt	Contemplation	75.	Silt	Defiance
10.	Enemy	Vengeance (177KA: Trolls destroy Deche)	76.	Enemy	Reverence
11.	Guthay	Slumber	77.	Guthay	Agitation
12.	Ral	Defiance			
13.	Friend	Reverence			
14.	Desert	Agitation			
15.	Priest	Fury (177KA: Jikkana dies)			
16.	Wind	Contemplation			
17.	Dragon	Vengeance			
18.	Mountain	Slumber (177KA: Hamanu made champion)			
19.	King	Defiance			
20.	Silt	Reverence			
21.	Enemy	Agitation			
22.	Guthay	Fury			
23.	Ral	Contemplation			
24.	Friend	Vengeance			
25.	Desert	Slumber			
26.	Priest	Defiance			
27.	Wind	Reverence			
28.	Dragon	Agitation			
29.	Mountain	Fury			
30.	King	Contemplation			
31.	Silt	Vengeance (177KA Trolls finished)			
32.	Enemy	Slumber			
33.	Guthay	Defiance			
34.	Ral	Reverence			
35.	Friend	Agitation			
36.	Desert	Fury			
37.	Priest	Contemplation			
38.	Wind	Vengeance			
39.	Dragon	Slumber (190th KA: Current year Rise & Fall)			
40.	Mountain	Defiance			
41.	King	Reverence			
42.	Silt	Agitation			
43.	Enemy	Fury			
44.	Guthay	Contemplation			
45.	Ral	Vengeance			
46.	Friend	Slumber (177KA Rajaat imprisoned; Borys dragon)			
47.	Desert	Defiance			
48.	Priest	Reverence			
49.	Wind	Agitation			
50.	Dragon	Fury			
51.	Mountain	Contemplation			
52.	King	Vengeance			
53.	Silt	Slumber			
54.	Enemy	Defiance			
55.	Guthay	Reverence			
56.	Ral	Agitation			
57.	Friend	Fury (178th KA Borys restored to sanity)			
58.	Desert	Contemplation			
59.	Priest	Vengeance			
60.	Wind	Slumber			
61.	Dragon	Defiance			
62.	Mountain	Reverence			
63.	King	Agitation			
64.	Silt	Fury			
65.	Enemy	Contemplation			
66.	Guthay	Vengeance			

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Regards the one or two thousand year problem.

Hamanu believes that the Cleansing wars could not have started more than two hundred years before his birth, no matter what the chronicles and legends say. Borys, who had no reason to tell him anything but the truth, said he'd been fighting dwarves for two hundred years. And Hamanu knows it's only been a thousand years since they imprisoned Rajaat.

Most of the cities are considerably older (although not Urik). It is likely, according to Hamanu, that the so-called Green Age which the Cleansing wars ended, had endured for somewhere between one and two millennia. It is also possible that Dregoth was immortal before he was made a champion; this would, perhaps account for Dregoth's so-rapid advancement through the metamorphosis.

Likewise, some of the confusion results from the fact that prior to the arrival of their champions, both Balic and Draj employed a completely different calendar which calculated years from single equinoxes rather than paired ones, and the double numbering persisted for Ages. Also, there's a unit of time measure called a Dealt which in Tyr, Urik, Raam, Draj, Yaramuke, and Giustenal was *five* King's Ages, while in the other parts of the Tablelands it was *ten* King's Ages, which, what with one thing and another has led to chronical confusion— not to mention a desire, over time, on the part of the sorcerer-kings of the city-states to disassociate themselves from the Champions of the Cleansing Wars, whose names are remembered in the private legends of the Rebirth races they sought to exterminate— hence the choosing of new names by most of them.

Hamanu insists it's been just over 1001 years or thirteen King's Ages since he and the others imprisoned Rajaat.

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Except for Father, she has had no friends, and not been aware of the lack. She is elegant, yet feral

Pavek— One-time civil templar of Urik, currently a neophyte druid responsible for the largest, oldest grove in Quraite (Telhami's grove, older than the Dragon, which she ceded to him at her death.) He's come a long way from the mean streets of Urik, although the last time he was in the city he roused the hitherto unsuspected Guardian Spirit of Urik itself. For all that he struggles to maintain Telhami's grove, there's a sense that his destiny is not in Quraite, but back in Urik. If nothing else, he has a open offer from Sorcerer-King Hamanu to fill the void in the High Templarate left by Escrissar's death.

Pavek's interest in magic remains high, although he is not the driven individual he was a year ago. He's acquired a family: the half-elf, Ruari, and the street-orphan, Zvain. Sometimes he wishes he'd acquired a wife to go with them, or at least had a moderately satisfactory relationship with a woman, but that's not high on his list of regrets. He's settled back into his somewhat stolid habits when *Cinnabar Shadows* begins, taking life as it flows toward him, rather than wrestling with his fate. There's unfinished business to attend to: Escrissar's halfling alchemist, but he's felt no great rush to deal with it.

Pavek's health and physique remain as they were: he's a big, powerfully built man with sharp eyes and fast reflexes. He looks mean: his hair is dark and shaggy, his lips are thin, his brows form a heavy ridge over deep-set, black eyes, the angles of his cheeks and chin are formidable. This much Pavek inherited from his unknown father. He can't remember the first time he broke his nose, but it's been busted at least five times, and there's a jagged scar on his jaw that gives him a more or less permanent scowl. He was a brawler and enforcer before he became a druid, and he was good at it, but he doesn't have the mean-tempered spirit to match his looks, a fact which the druids of Quraite and especially Zvain and Ruari have long-since figured out.

Ruari— A half-elf caught between adolescence and manhood, with a few roots still struck deep in childhood. Fully possessed of all the insecurities ascribed to half-elves in the DarkSun game material, plus a thick veneer of entrenched alienation from just about everything. In short— a young man in his late teens.

Ru's mellowed just a bit, in no small part because he's conscious of role as "big brother" to Zvain. He has genuine affection/loyalty toward the orphan. His relationship with Pavek is more complex; he *expects* things from Pavek which Pavek cannot always deliver. He has a tendency to vacillate between mature and immature behavior.

Physically, Ruari is a bit on the short-and-stocky side for a half-elf (which doesn't help his self-esteem problems at all), but otherwise he is an attractive specimen with coppery hair a few shades darker than his skin. He aspires to elven endurance and human strength. Insofar as the druids are not bound by any creed to non-violence and insofar as Yohan was a warrior of considerable skill and Pavek regularly succumbs to Ru's requests to "let's you and me go a few rounds," Ruari knows his way around the more common Athasian weapons, especially a hardwood staff.

Ruari is less sensitive these days about his singular half-elf ability to befriend animals. Zvain finds the kivits fascinating and pesters Ruari to take him to his grove as regularly as Ruari pesters Pavek about fighting.

Telhami— If Elabon Escrissar is the dark gray eminence left over from *Brazen Gambit*; Telhami is the light gray one. Her spirit has become the latest veneer of personality overlaying Quraite's guardian spirit. She is most accessible in her old grove, where Pavek spends his time, and where he frequently glimpses her as a translucent green figure dispensing advice he'd just as soon not hear. (In her spirit form she pays more attention to Pavek than to Akashia, although she is not ignorant of current events and expresses that she's satisfied with Akashia's handling of Quraite's affairs).

She is the source of all druidic wisdom in Quraite, and a fair amount of current information as well. She still does not talk about Hamanu, except to imply that she knows him quite well. She is more guarded about whatever it is that Pavek's roused in Urik. The notion of a spirit guardian of a non-natural feature of the Athasian landscape is something new under the Dark Sun, but not necessarily an improvement.

Zvain— thirteen now, and not so small for his age, but still wiry and wary: life in Quraite has agreed with him— which is surprising, to him at least, considering the circumstances of his arrival. But he has the patronage of both Pavek and Ruari, who are accounted heroic stature for their roles in the community's survival.

He's becoming more impatient with Pavek's willingness to linger in Quraite when there's work to be done. Urik may be safe; Escrissar may be dead, but Kakzim is out there, and there'll be another poison, another plague. And, besides, Zvain can't really feel free until he's settled all the scores outstanding with Escrissar's household.

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PLACES

The Codesh Abattoir— Codesh is another of the satellite market villages ringing Urik. Unlike most of the other villages, the village Codesh specializes in animals: slaughtering them, butchering them, turning them into sausage and smoked (or air-dried) meat, processing their hides into leather, their bones into fertilizer and building materials, and their offal into glue. Urik owns the facilities and warehouses, but the work itself is done not by slaves but by self-organized gangs of nominally free workers, under the equally nominal supervision of Civil Bureau Templars. In practice, the work gangs run the entire operation. Although there are periodic sweeps of the village for contraband and runaway slaves, the templars are generally content to stay in the gatehouses, so long as civil order is maintained and there are no reports of tainted meat reaching the city.

The abattoir is one of the large processing facilities, specifically the vast, open-roof structure (with galleries) where freshly slaughtered carcasses are hung to bleed out for several days until rigor stiffened muscles relax enough to permit butchering. The various gangs post guards over the racks where their particular carcasses are hung, moving a few out each day, and replacing these with fresh slaughters.

Although there are very few vegetarians in Urik, the workers of Codesh are regarded as "untouchables" by just about everyone, including slaves. The gangs have existed for generations beyond living memory. They are inbred and distrustful of outsiders. The templar sweeps may turn up contraband, but very, very rarely do they flush out runaway slaves.

Codesh has its own microcosm society, an odd mixture of selfassuredness— they know they are the only ones who can do what they do, and that they are necessary to Urik's survival— and paranoia— they also know that they are outcast, despised, cheated by everyone when the opportunity arises. In short, they are prime fodder for the occasional charismatic figure who comes along with a promise of redressing their grievances with the Outside. Kakzim isn't particularly charismatic, but his message has been quite potent: He's convinced them that Urik means to do away with their way of life, that it has been stockpiling animal products, and training replacement workers in a huge cavern that lies between Codesh and the city.

Halfling forest— "The mountains on this side of the range were even steeper than those facing Tyr. Instead of barren yellow-orange rocks, the slopes were covered by a dense forest of indigo-neededled conifers. These towering trees looked as though they were performing some primitive, gyrating dance. Their red trunks were segmented by pivoting joints that creaked and groaned as the powerful wind contorted them into an endless succession of shapes.

"There were also smaller trees— at least Rikus assumed them to be trees— with large, white-barked trunks shapes like balls. From the tops of these globes rose sprays of huge fronds covered with heart-shaped leaves.

"Long strings of moss dangled off the boughs of both kinds of trees. From these damson strands sprouted an astounding array of colorful mushrooms, most shaped like bells and as big around as Rikus's fist. On the ground flourished a puffy, billowing mass of yellow undergrowth. In the distance, more than a dozen steep ridges covered with the same profuse vegetation reared up, presenting themselves to Rikus.

"A great cloud covered the base of the mountains like an immense blanket of cotton, glowing rosy pink with the light of the setting sun. This cloud sent tendrils of thick mist creeping into every one of the deep valleys lying between the ridges ahead." Troy Denning: *The Verdant Passage* p255-256

Quraite — the given name of the druidic hamlet community led by Telhami. A collection of about a dozen druids, mostly human, and an equal number of non-druid associates who dwell in relative comfort and harmony several days' hard journeying beyond the green belt of Urik. Wattle-and-daub is the construction technique of choice (and proving less choice now that it rains more frequently). Living arrangements are informal, with the sworn druids tending toward solitary abodes and the non-druids clumping in small family units. Cottages ring a central bare-ground gathering-place and well-head. Kitchen gardens form an outer ring beyond the cottages. Domestic animals are in evidence, but they are penned, not herded. An empty patch of land roughly the same size as the hamlet lies about a hundred yards away and serves as the camping ground for those elven tribes whose trade and company are welcomed.

Telhami's druids are somewhat unusual in their communal lifestyle. The hamlet lies roughly at the center of a more or less circular splotch of "guarded land." The druids, who do not tend the kitchen gardens or domestic animals, spend days at a time in their private retreats within the greater (and slowly expanding) extent of guarded land. The relationship between the druids and the non-druids is one of symbiosis.

Telhami's private retreat may or may not actually be physically nearby— although both druids and non-druids visit it regularly, there is always a momentary sense of disorientation associated with the journey and unlike the other private retreats and the hamlet itself, no one has ever wandered into Telhami's retreat by accident. The flora and much of the

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fauna associated with the retreats maintained by the other druids were transplanted from Telhami's retreat. There is some vague sense of continuity and inheritance—the lesser retreats have been passed from parent to child within Telhami's lifetime (or to non-relatives or strangers); but Telhami's retreat is of an exponentially different order and seems to abide by different rules.

Quraite is self-sufficient in most respects. It trades with the elven tribes on a regular but infrequent and unpredictable basis. It relies on its looming neighbor, Urik, for those things it truly needs but cannot supply on its own. One of these needs is salt which is a city-run monopoly in Urik. The druids also rely on Urik for small amounts of metal and certain rare essences necessary in the more esoteric druid cult practices.

Quraite's relationship with Urik endures on equal parts of mutual need and distrust. Quraite lies within the Urik hegemony, and generally adopts the pragmatic, fatalistic policy "better the tyrant you know than a stranger" when it comes to politics. Certainly Hamanu has never displayed hostile intentions toward the community, yet it must be assumed that he is aware of its existence and general location. It is unlikely, however, that Hamanu has shared what *he* knows about Quraite with anyone else.

Compared to the opulence available in the better neighborhoods of any of the city-states, Quraite is a primitive and shabby community, but it is a true community which makes it one of the better possible abodes in the entire Tablelands.

Urik Relentlessly symmetric person that I am, I want to associate the Athasian city-state of Urik with the Sumerian city-state of Uruk— after all, what's a vowel among friends after all these years? Left to my own devices, I'll model the culture on Sumerian analogs, modified by the absence of the Euphrates and its floods. I'm also going to continue to assume that Urik, like the rest of the Tablelands is sitting on top of truly vast aquifer and that there's big water somewhere on Athas to replenish it.

The historic city of Uruk had about 50,000 inhabitants sprawled over roughly 1000 acres, which were enclosed by a defensive wall. It relied on at least 76 nearby dominated villages for foodstuffs etc. Unless there are objections, this is Urik's economic base. If there is a map of Urik (in addition to the narrative description of it in CRIMSON LEGION) I'd dearly like to see it. Failing that, since the CRIMSON LEGION describes Urik as a square city, I'll make Urik a square 1.25 mundane miles on each side (1 Urik mile, 1000 of Hamanu's paces, 2000 of his nose-to-fingertip yards, 6000 of his feet (what's the point of being a god if you're not the official standard by which all things in your purview are measured?))

That Urik's Sorcerer-King, Hamanu, is fundamentally evil is axiomatic, as is the corruption of the templarate. On the other hand, Hamanu has ruled Urik for over a thousand years and the city has not dissolved into chaos, rotted on its foundations, succumbed to natural disaster or to a foreign invader— an accomplishment unparalleled in human history (and not simply because Hamanu is both mighty and immortal). He and the templarate must possess some keen insight into the demands of civilization's social contract. He may be evil, but he must also be a true and adaptive genius. The cracks in Urik's repression and hierarchy— be they result of corruption or enlightenment— must be large enough to convince the majority of those 50,000+ citizens that life is worth living generation after generation.

Applying the usual rule-of-thumb that it takes at least ten honest men to support one thief and an equal number of bureaucrats to support one front-line soldier, I'm going to assume that there are no more than 2500 templars in the city, about 1200 each in the civil and war bureaus and 100 High Templars in the High Bureau. I'm also going to fudge the game-based prohibition on literacy; writing came into existence because merchants and tax collectors both need receipts, and while templars can replace tax collectors, it is unlikely that merchants are nobles (although most nobles probably started out as templars or merchants). A form of token-script intelligible to all citizens of Urik and most outsiders must exist. An abstract alphabet, either obscurely derived from that token script over the course of Hamanu's thousand year reign, or predating it entirely, forms the basis of the secret writings of the templatate and nobility.

Recent events have brought unprecedented changes to the Tablelands in general Hamanu undoubtedly senses unprecedented opportunity for increasing Urik's hegemony. He has been revealed to be somewhat different from the other dragon-kings, but pending further investigation of his character, this should not be terribly significant.

Urik's Market Villages— There are ten of them. Of these, I've named Codesh (Codeshites) due west of Urik, Modekan (Modekaners) to the SE, Todek (Todekites) whose location hasn't been pinned down, Khelo (Khelons) probably in the NE and where king's kank pens are maintained, and Farl which is the next clockwise village beyond Codesh.

Urik's Reservoir— Urik relies on a good-sized lake in a impressive limestone cavern for its year-in, year-out water. The lake is bound to an aquifer that clearly does not depend on Tablelands rainfall to maintain itself. Aqueducts as old as the city tap the lake and channel water downhill to Urik; the natural outflow of the lake, however, moves under the satellite village of Codesh, which uses the water to rid itself of the effluent produced by its animal processing industries. One of the aqueducts is a dry maintenance passageway. The aqueducts aren't really maintained, though— whoever built them knew

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what he/they were doing and the construction has never failed (nor is it likely to fail). The dry passage is used mostly by a few derelicts, outcasts and such who, understanding that next to air, water is the only thing life absolutely has to have on a regular basis, make their home on the stygian shores of the underground lake. The more venturesome denizens of this small colony (rarely more than about fifty individuals at any time) venture into Urik for solid food and such (there are blind fish in the reservoir) as their environment cannot provide them.

Although the cavern is a safe refuge for anyone needing it, life in a pitch-dark cave usually doesn't appeal in the longterm. Of those who find the cavern, few stay very long. Infravision, by-the-by, doesn't help much. The community has torches and campfires, rendering it non-essential, and the dry aqueduct is lifeless and of uniform temperature, rendering it basically useless.

The notion that Urik's water ultimately comes from an underground lake is fairly widespread through the city. The notion that there are aqueducts and someone built them is generally restricted to High Templars and ranking templars of the Civil Bureau. That there is an underground community around the reservoir is the stuff of urban legends.

THINGS

BlackTree Brethren— Halfling oral tradition preserves stories of the transformation of primeval island paradises into lush green hunting grounds by halfling psionic scientists who shared their new world with new races. They then relate how those new races— humans among them, though there's every chance that humans are also indigenous to Athas and were the raw material which the halflings reshaped into the old "new" races— dominated the land with agriculture, industry, and population. Further, according to the old tales, Rajaat, the human sorcerer who introduced magic to compete with halfling psionics, proposed to cleanse the despoiled Tablelands. He came to the halfling elders, seeking their aid. The elders refused, Rajaat created human Champions who did their jobs, then rebelled against their creator. Those same Champions still rule the devastated once-green, once-blue Tablelands.

Mainstream halfling culture allows the clannish, forest-dwelling to remember and mourn what was lost, but the elders know that in every generation, in every village, there'll be a hot-head or two who cannot accept the present. Wise elders send these intemperate youths into the forest, in search of the BlackTree and the halflings who dwell above its roots. Acculturated halflings would say that the BlackTree and its Brethren are the stuff of myth— although generally the halflings are not mythmakers— and that the young halflings who leave home searching for the BlackTree are doomed.

But there is a secret, secretive order that congregates around the oldest tree in the forest. It was founded while Rajaat's Champions still fought their bloody campaigns. Those who find their way to the BlackTree are initiated into a society that preserves halfling history not as fireside tales, but alchemic formulae, including the lifecodes of every living thing under the bloody sun. It is also dedicated to rectifying the terrible mistake the halfling elders made when they refused to help Rajaat. The Brethren nurture the hope that they will be able to erase a hundred erroneous generations; they balk at nothing which seems to set them even a tiny step closer to their goal.

The Brethren aren't total fools. There's no way they can accomplish what Rajaat's Champions failed to do— and did not even *try* to do where humans were concerned. Halflings are not a warlike people. They could never mount a winning campaign against the mixed races. Their psionic discipline is a potent power, but no true match for the Dark Lens-augmented sorcery controlled by Tablelands sorcerers, especially Rajaat's Champions, now become the Dragon Kings. Their sole hope has always been to incite war between the city-states, between the races, and within them as well.

In addition to their philosophical goals, the Brethren have preserved much of the ancient halfling psionic lore, not as fireside stories, as the village elders have preserved it, but in useful formulae. Once they have memorized significant portions of the lore, initiates leave the forest for the Tablelands where they settled into dual identities, one part artisan, making use of the memorized lore, the other part— the larger, more important part— relentless opportunist, inciting hatred and unrest wherever, whenever possible.

While Borys lived, the Brethren's best efforts served only to prolong a stalemate. Since his death, along with Rajaat and several of the other surviving Champions, there is hope. More youthful halflings have been recruited, more sent onto the Tablelands. Those Brethren who were already in the Tablelands have redoubled their efforts, for concurrent with the sense that the goal is within their grasp, rivalries have arisen within the Brethren.

There is an increasing recklessness among the Tablelands Brethren. Long-kept secrets, including the addictive soporific, Laq, have been revealed and disseminated through the City-States in the hopes of destabilizing them and provoking them to both internal and external conflict. Such acts have drawn the attention of other individuals and associations who preserved ancient knowledge, recognize it when they see it and can draw their own conclusions, thank you.

The BlackTree Brethren reserves an especial enmity for druids, since if druidic practice were allowed to flourish (especially the encroaching green philosophies of hermetic husbandry communities like Quraite), the cleansing the order

[illegible]

proposes would not be necessary. There is an unproved belief that the "guardian spirits" with whom powerful druids forge spiritual bonds are the same as the more diffuse entities perceived through halfling psionic science. On the chance that this might be true, BlackTree initiates are cautioned to give druids wide berth and not to risk falling afoul of them, lest the land be forced to choose between halflings and druids— at least until halfling redominance is a foregone conclusion.

Templars The all-encompassing civil service of a Tablelands city which has had thousands of years in which to become stratified, codified, and ritualized— not to mention corrupt. The concept of life-long mortal service to an immortal despot is surely rooted in one of the lower circles of hell. Hamanu holds all the cards. All personal gains are transitory; all victories, conditional. Even the most able and ambitious templar cannot truly plan for the future. Templars are existentialists of the first water; if they have moral or ethical scruples, these are strictly situational.

The overall term for the service is "TEMPLARATE" or "the bureaus." There three bureaus: the high bureau, civil bureau, and war bureau. Labyrinthine is scarcely sufficient to describe the internal structure of these bureaus or the intra-bureau rivalries and feuds between and among them— nonetheless, everyone knows (or thinks they know) exactly who is above them in the hierarchy and who is below. In general, those in the High Bureau know that everyone else is below them. Those in the war bureau know that they are better than a templar in a civil bureau if only because all war bureau templars are officers in Hamanu's army (which consists of conscripts, petty criminals, debtors, and the odd enlistee) whereas the civil bureau consists not only of officer-rank templars, but also "enlisted" ranks. Pride is assuaged over in the civil bureau by the knowledge that what they lack in prestige, they make up for in pure graft.

The templatate seethes with politics, rivalries, ambitions, vengeance and such like— but it never really changes.

All templars are granted clerical magic through their association with Hamanu. What is granted is not often used, at least by the vast majority of ordinary worker-bee templars who are strictly accountable for whatever magic they siphon to themselves. As the ancient Greeks understood that the last thing a mortal wanted was the attention of the gods, the worker-bee templars understand that they do not EVER want Hamanu to notice them. (This is somewhat modified in the war bureau where offensive and defensive specialists conduct Urik's equivalent of artillery and such, but even in the war bureau, the unauthorized use of magic will cause problems and— of course— it's virtually impossible for a templar to the magic Hamanu grants him/her without someone knowing about it (usually Hamanu himself).)

Non-templars tend to think that all templars are alike (and since they are all the intimate products of feudal, regimented, repressive culture, this is substantially true), but templars themselves are acutely aware of the differences between each and every one of them. They tend to live in a constant state of anxiety (which probably accounts for the high incidence of psychosis, etc. among them). Tension is greatest in the lower layers of the hierarchy and, in particular, in the lower layers of the civil bureau.

A templar's power does not corrupt in the sense that it makes him/her "evil;" it corrupts because the templarate is a hierarchy, not a community (especially at the lower levels) and the individuals within it dwell in intense isolation and frozen anarchy. Some templars become sadists or sociopaths, but more of them become apathetic.

Note: war-bureau templars display their ranks on their right sleeves, civil-bureau templars wear theirs on their left.

Urban Architecture The climate and ecology of the Urik Tablelands tend to determine the physical appearance of the city. The weather is fundamentally unchanging: blistering hot by day, downright cold at night, and always dry. The heat is a bigger problem than the cold. Buildings are designed to resist heating as much as possible and shed it efficiently. Inclement weather has traditionally taken the form of dust and sand storms, from which there is no real protection, so buildings are designed to survive such storm, but little more.

In the CRIMSON LEGION, the structures of the templar quarter were described in some detail (three-stories high and faced with glazed brick). Additional descriptions were supplied of a noble townhouse atrium. In both cases the general descriptions were, in fact, consistent with the archeological evidence from Uruk. Unfortunately, Uruk came into being largely because of the Euphrates river, an asset Urik clearly doesn't have.

Although Urik dominates a mountainous area and maintains contact with the forest-dwelling halflings, the lack of rivers discourages the transportation of wood or stone over long distances. The abiding scarcity of both wood and water would seem to determine the final shape of both the city and domestic life. Adobe requires mud, which requires water, other types of bricks require not only water, but baking kilns as well. I think that in addition to getting obsidian from the Makla mines, Urik also uses volcanic heat to manufacture cement powder from clay and limestone (both of which are probably available below the desert pavement, if not on top of it) which is then transported back to Urik and used to bind sand and gravel into a primitive concrete. Where wood is used, (certainly in the noble quarter, possibly in some parts of the templar quarter and by the wealthier mercantile houses) it would be decorative as well as structural (refer: pictures of medieval Damascus townhouses). The same would hold true for glazed brick (although I'm thinking through a mcguffin which would incorporate a moveable lens into the dome of a kiln and thereby allow the creation of faience glaze, cement, and some

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glassware through ``solar" power).

Outside the privileged compounds and precincts, I imagine that Urik is filled with relatively low structures each having thick, concrete-block-faced, rubble-filled walls and few, if any, windows— except for clerestory windows between the upper most walls and the ceiling, which exists primarily to provide shade and (owing to a lack of timber for roof-beams) usually does not cover the entire area between the walls but is more of a netted or canvas awning. If a full roof is desired (for security or privacy) the beams are probably made from mekillot rib bones and, as a result, are not flat. The CRIMSON LEGION has moss-stranded nets slung across a noble atrium but the problem with hanging gardens is that they require a lot of water. The Ancient Near East wasn't as dry when it wasn't as ancient as it is now. Sumerian city-states were as worried about floods as they were about droughts.

Multi-storied structures probably exist in the wealthier quarters or in such civic structures as the warehouses and granaries, but primarily Urik squats and sprawls. Many people probably live permanently in tents even inside the city walls.

There are no chimneys or fireplaces for heat. Cooking is done either in efficient sealed ovens or over small, hot fires (probably dung-fueled). Wealthy residents may tap the presumed underground aquifer directly with their own well, but most people would have to use public wells. Those fortunate enough to live in a permanent structure (or to run a business in such a structure) would have one or more cisterns in the most protected, shaded place of honor.

Some security is built into the walls in the form of a crown of broken ceramics and other sharp objects. Other security would be provided by watchmen and living creatures.

There is no plumbing or sewage. Water is too scarce to squander in such a way, and all organic waste is probably recycled as fertilizer. The dry climate presumably minimizes the odor and incidence of disease. Scavenging, the most primitive form of recycling, is probably an art form. The scarcity of fuel precludes cremating the dead, the sheer duration of the Tablelands cities precludes permanent burial. The newly dead are most likely consigned to ossuaries (boneyards) and it is likely that corpses (sentient and non) are thoroughly knacked.

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b e y r y : a m e s . w p a d g e f e b
r u a r y : a m e s . w p a d g e f e b

NEWS FLASH

Disregarding everything else— consider that Hamanu *doesn't* know everything from the start. He's not omniscient and he truly thinks that his erstwhile peers couldn't possibly be foolish enough to get themselves entangled with an alliance with Rajaat. He can't quite figure what's going on, initially, because he's giving those peers more credit than they deserve. He sees new alliances between Nibenay and Guistenal, can't figure what's what with Gulg, etc. etc.

The revelations in chapter 8 come as an unpleasant surprise.

Note also: suppose that Dregoth, the 3rd champion (and also the 1st and 2nd champions) had long since finished their cleansing campaigns (that their part in the mess had been mostly forgotten— centaurs, minotaurs and goblins having been completely forgotten). Dregoth pushed hard for the final transformation; Rajaat, with help, slew him. The rivalry between Borys and Dregoth was strong and endured until after Borys' death, when Dregoth felt free to move about again.

The relationship between Hamanu and Borys is not well known to the Champions. In general they were/are presumed to have been allies, which they never were, except against Rajaat, and that, only after Hamanu was able to persuade Borys of the real danger inherent in permitting him (the last) champion to become a dragon. Nonetheless, this will suffice to establish Dregoth's particular hatred of Hamanu (even though Hamanu had nothing to do with Dregoth's death (because Borys had had quite a bit to do with that unpleasant demise and the squelching of Dregoth's ambitions— although the Dark Lens connection continues to work for Dregoth, his undead condition has stopped his transformation. If he envisioned the metaphosis as an assumption of divinity, such was thwarted. (Which was exactly what Borys, Rajaat and whoever else might have helped Borys intended.)

Hamanu had *no* friends among the Champions. Dregoth and Sielba were his particular enemies. Dregoth as above. Sielba because she threw herself at him after his initial transformation and they were a ``number'' for a while, until he suspected that she wanted to do to him what they'd done to Wyan and Sacha so he could be to her what they were to Kalak (except that she, being a Champion, as Kalak wasn't, would be that much more powerful— not first among rough equals, as Borys was, but a truly peerless first.

Hamanu's rivalry with Nibenay is more cerebral. Gallard is the most advanced in his transformation and like Hamanu doesn't want to destroy his city. He's also the most snobbish and, possibly, the most learned; he regards Hamanu as retaining most of the undesirable traits of the manure in which he was raised (Beast may become beasts— meaning that Hamanu is a prime candidate for dragondom— but men should retain their higher nature. He is convinced that pushing Hamanu over the edge will not only resolve the Rajaat problem (perhaps Nibenay knows what Borys knew?) but will somehow allow him to progress through the metamorphosis without the rampaging problem. Perhaps Gallard is convinced that the avangion metamorphosis is the natural path, that with Hamanu as a dragon (wielding tighter control over the powers emanating from Rajaat and the Dark Lens, he (Gallard) will be able to complete his own ``proper'' metamorphosis and then backtrack to get rid of Hamanu.

Foolish youth. Foolish *dead* youth— yet, before the brutal, little drama can play its final, unwitnessed act, the market square echoes with the sounds of a door slamming, buskins slapping hard and heavy on the cobblestones, and a big man's big voice taking a proprietary interest in what happens to *his* beggar!

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With the bone-handled mallet he uses to pound his coarse-grain dough, the baker clouts the first bully from behind, dropping him in his tracks. He takes the second with a backhand swing across the mouth; the bully goes down in a spray of teeth, blood, and saliva. The third flees— successfully, because, instead of pursuit, the baker chooses to extend his hand into the shadows where the beggar hides.

But, no one's there— a fact not lost on the remaining pair. Bloody-mouth seizes Aching-head's arm and drags him out of the alley. With a fearful, worried sigh, the baker tucks his mallet in his belt and starts back to his shop.

The beggar is unrolling his mat in the usual place.

4. The morning's cool and breeze linger on the sunny balcony where the Lion-king eats his breakfast and receives his daily briefings. An interlocutor, a templar of the Civil Bureau's highest rank with weighty, precious threads embroidering his sleeve, concludes his report. Hamanu tears open a brioche-style loaf of bread and spreads it liberally with jam the same color as his smoldering amber eyes.

There is, he says, a small bakery on the southern verge of Joiners' square—

The templar hastens to say the shop will be closed, the proprietor punished—

Without seeming to notice the templar's eagerness, Hamanu says, instead, that he wants two sacks of the finest flour in the warehouses and a purse of silver delivered to the baker— *now*— with orders that the man should bake a score of the finest loaves he knows how to make (which will not put a significant dent in either the sacks or the purse) and deliver them to the palace for the Lion-king's supper.

The templar's face brightens: He approves. He'll make certain that the ``dedicated followers of royal fashion'' know that their king is patronizing a new baker. The fellow's fortune's are sure to rise. Will there be anything else? he asks.

To which Hamanu replies: ``One may hope the man's bread is as good as his mallet."

And one may note that Hamanu is softly humming a familiar melody.

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r u a r y : a m

Chapter Two

3rd Person, intense internal viewpoint

Hamanu has finished his breakfast and his briefings. Minions scurry about silently, taking away the debris, laying out the jewels and weapons he will wear when he descends from these, his semi-private chambers, to the public chambers where the real business of government takes place.

After all, God is in the details and Hamanu is Urik's only god.

He send the minion horde away. For a number of reasons, Hamanu dresses himself. (Most of the reasons have to do with the problems inherent in dressing an illusion and which are mostly solved by Hamanu "internalizing" his wardrobe, manifesting it on the surface of the illusion, and then— with remarkable care and fastidiousness, all things considered, stowing the clothes he's *not* wearing in the Gray (which around-the-corner, almost Black realm the Lion-king accesses not with a satchel (à la Tithian) but through the simple expedient of scratching a slit in the fabric of ordinarily perceived reality, stowing whatever needs stowing, and then sealing the leaky slit up again).)

Morning has moved into memory— in Hamanu's case, a very full and organized memory which includes the observed sensations of the countless simulacra he's created over the millennium. The midday gong resounds against the baking walls of the city and palace. Even a dragon ought to go inside, out of the heat, where there's work to be done, but just then— under the blistering noonday sun, when no one looks sunward, Hamanu strides over to the balcony rail. He is atop the highest tower of his sprawling palace. Naked— in his true and hated form as a metamorph— he surveys his city, reflecting on the tranquility and the dangers: the certain knowledge that in the anarchy that the Tablelands have become, even as he stands on his balcony, some fool with more ambition than sense is contemplating the obsidian transformation.

He's equally certain that his old enemies— his only peers— are plotting his downfall. Or, more properly, his final transformation. They are the Champions, they know no other way— never have, never will—

They will harry him as they harried first Rajaat, then Borys. But Hamanu will not surrender Urik and he will not destroy or let it be destroyed. He *will* find away. He is Hamanu; he has always found a way.

Then, with his eyes closed, Hamanu imagines himself as he was at the beginning: a solid youth, strengthened by a decade of hard, fruitful, farming— yet graceful, too: the beloved son of a village elder, the harvest dancer with a known and welcomed future before him.

A hot wind lifts his illusory hair as he remembers, then forgets: The wind is one of his spies. He turns around and greets a ghastly, ghostly hulk— the spirit of the last troll general, Windreaver bound in service since the final battle of Hamanu's Cleansing War. The troll has no love for his conqueror; he spies for Hamanu because he hopes, someday still, to bear the ill-tidings that will lead to the Lion-king's demise.

And Windreaver's excited today: There's an army forming on the plains of Nibenay. The Shadow-king does not lead it and it bears no banners, but Windreaver's skirled through the command tents, he's seen the maps drawn in blood on the skins of Urikite traders. Nibenay's coming. Nibenay's coming. The Shadow-king's coming, the scholar, Gallard Elf-Slayer, the oldest Champion, the First Champion, Father of a thousand times a thousand children: *heirs*, of which mighty Hamanu's got exactly none. . . .

Hamanu sheds his illusion, and long-dead Windreaver quails before the emerging dragon. Hamanu tells Windreaver to go back; and Windreaver departs. Hamanu says the ending has begun and departs.

First the trolls, then the Troll-Scorcher's army.

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b e y r y a . m s p d g e f e b
r u a r y : a m s p d g e f e b

Chapter Four

3rd Person Intense Personal Viewpoint

Hamanu is once again in the farmyard courtyard. This time Pavek, druid and high templar is with him. In point of fact, once again Pavek is rearranging the landscape to someone else's specification. Hamanu, it seems, can no longer dig in the dirt— except in his true form, and in his true form his touch defiles the plants and sterilizes the soil as effectively as if it had been sown with salt. (Which Hamanu explains to Pavek, who seems accustomed to Hamanu's revelations.) Per custom, Hamanu asks about the druid Guardian they both know exists somewhere within Urik, but which is never accessible when Hamanu is nearby (which Hamanu takes philosophically, considering his effect on green-growing things). They also talk briefly of Telhami, Pavek's undead mentor back in Quraite (where, apparently, Pavek has recently been (although Pavek's spent the better part of the last year (since the end of *Cinnabar Shadows*) wandering the forests beyond the Ringing Mountains with his companions: the half-elf, Ruari, and the human boy, Zvain).

Hamanu remembers Telhami. Once she tended this artificial farmyard, just as Pavek is tending it now. Hamanu's mind wanders. Sometimes when he remembers the past, images manifest themselves— as they did in the earlier vignettes, as they do now when a young Telhami joins them (she's beautiful, but she's not the woman who cradled the infant; *that* was Dorean). Sometimes, though, Hamanu simply falls silent, letting his thoughts flow toward any of the numerous simulacra who wander the city as his eyes and ears. And sometimes they wander because a minion has "drawn" his attention with word that someone's waiting in the audience chamber...

To which Hamanu leads Pavek— entering the waterfall room described in *Cinnabar Shadows*, and giving Hamanu a chance to comment upon his affection for waterfalls, and, thereby, giving Pavek the opportunity to comment on the waterfalls in Telhami's grove in Quraite.

Anyway, Javed, the black-skinned elven commandant from *Cinnabar Shadows* and the man whom Hamanu sent thither to deal with the Nibenese annoyance returns with the report that the Shadow-king's army dissipated like shadows themselves when the Urikite legions approached. The commandant thinks could have chased them all the way to Nibenay, and the tree-toting cowards wouldn't've put up a fight until their backs were against the city walls. Javed's at a loss to explain what the Shadow-kings's army was doing on Urik turf (or sand, or rock) in the first place— except, when his scouts swept through the Nibenese camp they found something strange: a shard of glass as long as an elf's arm, hard and sharp as the finest Tyrean steel, and warm to the touch.

More than warm: the first men who touched it died from the contact. To transport it, the commandant first wrapped it in silk which seemed to dampen the effect, then in oiled leather. He'd really prefer that the king unwrap this present himself. A pall creeps out of the silken package as Hamanu unwraps it. Hamanu orders the commandant and Pavek aside. Black, viscous, shadow-stuff flows from the shard's exposed tip; it loops around Hamanu's wrist, then quickly swirls upward around his forearm. There's a bad smell in the air and the water flowing in the chamber slows to a turgid trickle.

The Commandant is concerned: is this the Shadow-king's sorcery? Hamanu assures him that it is not as he untwines the shadows which becomes substantial in his hands, writhing and shot with a dark, malevolent light. Speaking to himself— or, perhaps, to the shadow-stuff, Hamanu says that he's not the man he once was. Then he wrings the shadow-serpent's neck; it dissipates as it falls toward the floor. Then Hamanu draws his own knife (which, one might observe, appears to be made of the same glassy material as the shard) and opens a vein in his forearm. The first few drops of his blood sizzle on the shard, then all appears quiet and normal, as quiet and normal as things ever appear in Hamanu's presence.

Hamanu whispers to no one in particular that he is the man "fate made of me."

Hamanu orders the commandant to raise the army's fullest levy: everyone who relies on Urik and Urik's king for protection, *will* rally to Urik's cause or suffer dire consequences. (Not you, Pavek. You're needed here. But your friends, here and in Quraite . . . yes, Quraite. It's *time*, Pavek; the end of time.)

Will there be war?

Undoubtedly.

With whom?

Hamanu doesn't know, or, rather, he knows it will be with everyone.

Hamanu summons Windreaver and demands to know what the spy is holding out. The ghostly troll insists he's hiding nothing until Hamanu threatens him with the shard. Has the Lens cracked? Windreaver asks. Is Rajaat free? Hamanu thinks not, but Windreaver can look for more shards; Windreaver can go to Ur Draxa and check things out.

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b e y r y : a m . w
r u a r y : a m . w

Chapter Five

First Person, past tense, self-aware and reflective

Young Manu joins the army of Myron Troll-Scorcher. He's quieter now, and chided for thinking he's better than the blooded veterans, some of whom are the children and grandchildren of troll fighters. No one can say, though, that Manu's not a born-soldier. He takes orders well (he was the youngest). He trains hard and fights harder, both with the trolls and with his arms-mates.

It's not long before Manu kills his first troll— a youth like himself (but bigger, of course, and brawnier, in the way of trolls) single-handedly while keeping night-watch on a forward picket.

After a thousand years, Hamanu marvels that he recalls his first kill with such breathtaking immediacy. In truth, he recalls it better than he recalls Dorean. Dorean is like a dream, an ethereal visitor from another time, another place, another life. But the troll— that's still part of this life, his life. Though he got sick and had difficulties with his conscience: The odds that this particular troll had had anything to do with the sack of Deche were not great. On the other hand, this particular troll would have killed *him*, because that's what men-at-arms are supposed to do: kill each other.

Which was a big problem with Myron Troll-Scorcher's army: When push came to shove, it was a good army for picket-duty and a sort of individual bravery, but it avoided the big battles where large numbers of humans might have died killing (one hoped) larger numbers of trolls. After all, the trolls had been demonized for the better part of two-hundred years and young Manu (Hamanu reflects) could be forgiven for thinking that humans were in some way more deserving of life than trolls, even though Manu already knew that the particular humans he was living with (and to that point in time Manu had only dwelt with humans, the complete segregation of the Tablelands races had been accomplished long before he was born (although how in H3ll it was accomplished really isn't clear to *me*))

Nonetheless, Manu brings the troll's head back to the main camp with him and is duly initiated as a veteran Troll-Scorcher (a rite which, among other things, introduces him to the fundamentals of sorcerous magic). In the celebration that follows, he falls afoul of some of the very veterans who arrived too late to save Deche (and who now include the officers of the army detachment into which Manu has just been initiated.) Ever inclined to speak his mind, Manu says something impolite to his superior and things go downhill from there. Manu kills one of the men who sat beneath his betroth's gutted corpse, drinking his father's wine. Manu kills the man with such vicious efficiency that the unit commander is unwilling (unable) to punish him for the murder. Manu's reputation is sealed and the other soldiers start calling him Ha-Manu, which, a thousand years ago in those parts, meant (literally) Hot-Manu, or (idiomatically) Fire-breathing Manu, or, even, Dragon Manu, although in those days dragons were legendary beasts quite different from the ``real" dragon Borys and others later became.

Add'l notes

October 19, 1995 (10:04am)

Re the troll: Did he leave behind anyone who knew his name? Who'd miss him or come looking for him. Troll bands were kinship bands. This one was young, maybe he'd gotten lost, maybe he'd come seeking his own glory. Either way, he'd have veteran kin somewhere who'd miss him.

Hamanu vs Bull

Hamanu is not a big man in his ``true" form— writing, and thinking, forces him back to what he once was, for the first time in a very long time. As he is, he wouldn't (shouldn't) get into physical fights with men of Pavék's size. But that never stopped him, even when he had no alternative. (He's a Bruce Lee, oriental type who doesn't bulk up well, there's a lot of muscle on a slightly-less-than-average size frame; he's no 90-lb weakling and never was— probably this comes from his mother's side of the family, which will allow him to comment on it.

He faces Bull, who's armed with a composite slashing sword, with only the club that he used to kill the troll. He doesn't feel too badly outclassed until he's siezed from behind, and the club is wrestled out of his hands. *These* are the folk— the human men and women— whose lives he saved last night (he has to believe the troll would have found them, would have killed them, even if he was lost; Hamanu would have done the same, especially if he had the natural advantages a troll had; at least that's what he thinks). But these humans would side with Bull (and the orders Myron of Hude has imposed on them) rather than a true fighter.

R b R I I n o t e s . w p a d g e f e b
b e y r y : a m s e b
r u a r y : a m s e b

Hamanu makes an impassioned speech from these thoughts:

Why are his comrades afraid of Myron of Hude? Yes, the Troll-Scorcher has awful magic, but *when* does he use it? — At the muster and only against those who can't oppose him. Does the Troll-Scorcher come into the field? When has Myron of Hude ever shown an interest in them, for good or bad?

True, an officer detail is supposed to ride the circuit every month or so, but how long has it been since Bull's band has seen one? They get down on their knees each time there's another outrage, lending their aspirations to Bull, who invokes the Troll-Scorcher's aid, but who listens? Who has ever listened?

(One suspects that around this point, Bull has attempted to make contact with Myron (and that Bull is the only one of the band so empowered. But it's clear that Bull doesn't have Myron's ear, and Hamanu feels the emotional tide begin to flow his way— and, reflecting, wonders if this is why, when the time came, he gave his templars medallions: in the field, fear, morale, and discipline are just different words for the same thing . . .)

In Myron's time, even when the message got through, the messenger was an officer, not the Troll-Scorcher.

Feeling the power swing his way, Hamanu continues. He chides his companions for abandoning their own kind for Myron Troll-Scorcher. What kind of man is the Troll-Scorcher, who's lived two hundred years (3 King's Ages) already. What does Myron of Hude care for them? What kind of human champion is he?

(In reflection: Rajaat's man, Rajaat's champion. Why couldn't he see it at the beginning? All the pieces were there in his grasp. Rajaat needed humanity— (only humans were flexible enough to be shaped by the Dark Lens, only humans could wield the sorcery Rajaat, a human beneath his deformity, had discovered). But Hamanu hadn't known that then and he led his men in the wrong direction—)

Why kind of humans, he'd asked, fight for Myron of Hude in a war where the only victims are other humans— not trolls, not the Troll-Scorcher . . . or his army

Because the Troll-Scorcher's army always runs from its enemy, praying as it runs, praying to a Champion who doesn't listen, doesn't care, doesn't want to win.

Well, DAMMIT, Hamanu's tired of running. He'd rather die fighting trolls, but if he's got to die fighting Bull, fighting his own kind, well, so be it— it's still better than running.

There's grumbling in the band. Bull's partisans call for Bull to put a quick end to the broy-tongued farmboy, but there's dissent now and calls for a ``fair fight." As fair as it can get: Hamanu gets his club back and is facing a bigger man with a sword.

Bull charges, like his many namesakes: a low hamstringing slice at Hamanu's bare legs (dirty pool, but the only vector Hamanu had left him)

The voice of Hamanu's humanity had called him with Dorean's memory: telling him how foolish it was that men were fighting each other when there were trolls around. Listening to that voice nearly got him killed. Bull attacked a second time and sliced open his arm (Hamanu rubs his bicep, the scar reappears— he lost the use of the arm until . . . until . . .)

It was kill or be killed. On Bull's next all-out attack, Hamanu bound the composite sword with the hook of his club, snapping away the upper third, pulling Bull close, in range of the knees Jikkana had shown him how to use to good advantage. He'd been a half-way decent wrestler *before*, but Jikkana made him deadly decent

Is the Oba with her army? She is. Does Hamanu want to do combat with her? Not right now. Hamanu tells the commandant to march no farther from Urik, no closer to the Oba's army, and not to hesitate to use his medallion when/if the situation changes.

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up to. If she's behind this or if she's a pawn. It will make a difference.

Now then, the above shouldn't have taken more than half the chapter, or at least it should leave enough space for us to deal with the leftover material from Chapter seven— the encounter with Myron of Yoram, including the many times death that Hamanu suffered at the Troll-Scorcher's hands (mind) because he wouldn't capitulate.

It can be noted that Pavek evidences understanding for Hamanu (the human man's) behavior; it's the sort of stubbornness he's often been accused of, which will amuse and mystify Hamanu . . . after all these years (and now, of all times when the Tablelands are approaching a crisis, another destiny-corner around which he cannot see) is he developing a taste for empathy . . . compassion and sympathy? In preference to fear?

R b R I I n o t e s . w P p a d g e e b
b e y r y a m s e b
r u a r y : a m s e b

Chapter Nine

First person, past tense, self-aware and reflective

Rajaat War-Bringer was the first and last man Hamanu has ever feared. The deformed human's pores ooze with sorcerous power, and other power which farm-raised Manu couldn't name. Mindbending power, Hamanu knows it intimately now, but then he could only dread Rajaat's promises, because more potent than the War-Bringer's power was his madness.

Yet Rajaat's promises (Hamanu knows) always had substance, even when they weren't entirely truthful or accurate. As the War-Bringer's hands pass over his battered body, Manu's pain ebbs away. Though his wounds remain open and seeping, he is able to rise up from his pallet and see that the room is quite crowded. In the blink of his unilluminated eye, Manu knows their names, although he can't put names and faces together. Every child knows the *names* of the Champions. And any fool with a half-lick of sense could see that the Champions are not here willingly.

Rajaat chides the twelve Champions (well, Myron, too, although there's a sense of doom surrounding that cage, and Myron doesn't seem to be paying attention.) Omniscience is truly hard to come by, even for a mad sorcerer with unprecedented powers: Rajaat had not known how they'd perverted his directives, how they'd deceived him into thinking their armies were hard-pressed. (Rajaat does not leave the Pristine Tower. He can't. The sorcery here supports his deformed body; he'd collapse in a helpless heap of bones if he left. (There would be ways around this, of course, but Rajaat has not pursued them . . . until *now*.)

Rajaat concedes he's made a mistake. The erstwhile Champions are flawed shadows of the Champions he intended to make— the Champion he will make today out of a fine lump of clay (Rajaat means Manu, to Manu's distress). But, they will help. The twelve will donate a goblet of their own blood, a morsel of their own flesh. Myron will donate his entire being.

Withered creatures, halflings, perhaps, but unlike the halflings then or now, help a still-battered Manu up the shallow, treacherous stairway to the Steeple of Crystals where the light is filtered through an immense diadem of brilliant jewels— though the most brilliant jewel of all has no color and filters no light: it is the Dark Lens and jagged streaks of pure power race across its surface.

Rajaat helps those who help themselves. He puts a knife in Hamanu's hand and points him toward Myron's cage. Kill him and be transformed: drink his blood, consume his flesh, *become* the Troll-Scorcher. It is not a good time for hesitation— if Manu were minded to hesitate, which he's not. He's seen enough to know that trolls and humans can never forget, never forgive, never be reconciled after the past two centuries (he's had time to reconsider this judgment— certainly dwarves and elves were reconciled— but it was a righteous decision at the time). Manu plunges the knife (in substance, its blade resembles the glassy shards currently causing concern) between Myron's ribs and catches the spewing blood in a shining goblet.

Fortunately for Manu, Myron distills from the inside out. Consuming him— a being somewhat larger than the average sized man that Manu is— is not quite the logistical problem it might otherwise be. It's not pleasant, though, and not healthy for an otherwise normal, mortal man. Indeed, Manu feels quite unsteady by the time the deed is done (consummated, if you will). He'd like to attribute this to the lingering effects of his torture and beating, but he knows that would be kidding himself. What he doesn't know, even when Rajaat helps him into a shallow blackwater pool beneath the gemstone diadem, is where this magic is taking him.

The scintillating streaks in the Dark Lens reach toward him, caressing him with sensations of which pain and agony are pale, mortal shadows. Yet, with the pain come strength, power, and knowledge. Myron Troll-Scorcher's strength, power and knowledge, but purged of the failed Champion's personality. About two hundred years of history flood Hamanu's mind, bringing with them the awesome realization of what can be done with sorcery and mindbending combined. And much can be done— although not the "clean" magic he'd choose to use, if the choice were his to make.

Behold, Rajaat says as Hamanu steps out of the pool. Behold the Final Champion!

Well, nearly final. There are a few more details: He must drink the blood and eat the flesh of the other Champions; and they get to do the same with him. They know, and Hamanu knows, that he's different from them— but that is all that the round-robin sharing of flesh seems to accomplish. The coup de cuisine comes between Rajaat and Hamanu alone. In this exchange, Hamanu learns the secrets of the "clean" magic, which he cannot use himself, but which he can bestow on those he chooses as his minions. Hamanu also feels for the first time the aching hunger for *trolls*.

Hamanu looks upon his creator with undisguised disgust and hatred. Then, imbued with power he doesn't like to use and a heinous appetite for trolls, Hamanu leaves the Pristine Tower to finish Rajaat's war.

Chapter Ten

First Person, past tense, self-aware and reflective

Nineteen years pass. Battles are fought, and won, and not described (Hamanu judges them of no great interest: We fought; I won— > that's the way he sees it.) He harries the trolls across the breadth of their homeland (aided and guided by the unique hunger-sense for trolls that Rajaat gave him (and which Hamanu detests as much as he relies upon it)). The trolls are brave, fierce warriors by nature and desperation increases their battlefield morale. They have "clean" magicians among them (and a smaller number of defilers). The battle is never easy, but under Hamanu's firm discipline, the trollscorcher army has become an army of soldiers, not warriors. Individual accomplishment is rewarded, but infrequent; the success of Hamanu's army, like that of Rome and Revolutionary France, lies in its team discipline, and— somewhat surprisingly, perhaps— the loyalty and personal commitment the soldier make to their leader.

Hamanu asks nothing of his men that he does not ask of himself and though he takes no prisoners from his battlefields— his is total war to annihilate the enemy— he doesn't indulge his Champion's passions and appetites. His strong but seared body remains a thing of horror both to himself and those around him because he doesn't sate himself with either the physical or ethereal remains of his vanquished enemy. (The rites which made him a champion destroyed his living flesh; the Champions are alive and immortal, but only the essence of their chosen enemies truly nourishes them— at least until Rajaat is imprisoned and Borys becomes a dragon . . . *Note:* With Borys gone, the remaining Champions are getting hungry again; Sadira's ward-spells are not enough to blunt the force of the Dark Lens.) Hamanu lives a life of constant, gnawing hunger and unyielding pride and cold hatred. He becomes skilled at the art of illusion, leading the army with life-like simulacra. He inspires his army and, to a different degree and for different reasons, inspires the other Champions to shake of their indolence.

In the year of Silt's Vengeance, the final battle with the trolls takes place on the shores of the Great Silt Sea. It is a terrible battle. Hamanu is well-beyond his own supply-lines; his own forces will starve— or rebel— before the trolls capitulate. If the trolls would ever capitulate. The trolls have been preparing for this last stand; their generals are shrewd and experienced strategists. Hamanu must attack fast and decisively, or retreat. The remaining troll magic-users deploy their power in strictly defensive arrays, forcing Hamanu to send wave after wave of hand-to-hand troops against a dug-in and fortified position. Numerically, he has a huge advantage— and reason to wonder if any numeric advantage will be enough as the natural ramparts run red with human blood.

After three days, however, the troll-mages are exhausted, the last perimeter collapses, and resistance fades. No more than fifty trolls remain alive, including their wily general, Windreaver, who's fought from the very beginning. Restraining what's left of his army from massacre (no small accomplishment in itself; in sheer number, Hamanu's losses were huge, at least three-quarters of his soldiers have died. Considering the wounded, no more than one in twenty humans who began the battle is able to bear arms at the end of it) Hamanu offers Windreaver terms he knows the troll cannot accept: slavery— with complete segregation of the troll men and women until the last troll is dead— or self-annihilation (except for Windreaver himself, whose spirit Hamanu will bind to his own as a conscience and reminder).

In venom and contempt, Windreaver and the other trolls reject slavery. By the next dawn's light, they march— the stronger supporting the weaker, silently into the silty sea. Hamanu feels them die, one by one, until only Windreaver remains. The veteran troll tries to cheat, tries to die, but he's no match for one of Rajaat's champions. Before Windreaver can die, Hamanu seals the troll's spirit in a common beach pebble, then secrets the pebble beneath his own skin where, surrounded by Rajaat's magic, the troll will live as long as Hamanu does.

This is not *Casablanca*. This is not the start of a beautiful friendship. Windreaver has never wavered in his hatred; Hamanu can never forget what he did. (This is not to say that Hamanu thinks he did anything *wrong*. He would have pursued the trolls to the last regardless, but, having won his war, he nevertheless believes that someone must remember the trolls and the price both humans and trolls paid to Rajaat's madness.)

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b e y r y a . m s p d g e f e b
r u a r y : a m s p d g e f e b

Chapter Eleven

First person, past tense, self-aware and reflective.

Note: it's possible that I'll put a 3rd person bridge between chapter ten and eleven; depends on how the overall word-count is doing.

Hamanu disbands his army then and there by the Silt Sea. There is nothing left for them to do, he insists, nothing left for him to do, except go back to what remains of Deche and start over. But starting over, whether for a Champion or an ordinary man, is easier said than done. Hamanu himself pursued a scorched earth policy to drive the trolls to the sea brink— and he's one of the more conscientious and conservative of the Champions.

The few people who remain at Deche eke out a miserable existence from the drained soil. It will be years— generations or ages— before crops grow freely again. (Note: for the sake of argument and consistency, 77-year Ages replace 100-year centuries and a millennium is 13 Ages, or 1001 years.) And there's nothing a Champion can do about it, except toil beside his neighbors, returning as much to the soil (in the form of mulches, manures, and compost) as any farmer can while taking as little away as possible.

It's a hard life, but a rewarding one— for a man who remains a farmer at heart, no matter what's happened to his body or spirit. Still, once a Champion, always a Champion. Those who remember Manu, and the place Manu's family occupied in Deche, are predisposed to look to him for wisdom and protection. And those who served in his army and survived, look upon Hamanu roughly the same way. Slowly those veteran folk (and their families and the families of those who didn't survive the war) wend their way toward Deche, because the Cleansing Wars still rage in the Tablelands. And, worse than the Champion armies or their enemies, are the freebooters mustered out of the armies as other Champions complete their appointed annihilation.

Hamanu finds he has little time for farming. He doesn't really have enough time to *be* all the things the refugees expect him to be. Will he or nil he, and with Windreaver laughing in his ears, Hamanu becomes de-facto lord of the Kreegill. Lording isn't much like fighting or leading an army, but it is a bit like farming: Things sown and harvested in their proper season; winnowing the grain from the chaff; weeding the planted fields, but letting weeds and tares grow on the fallow land. Hamanu's a good farmer— meaning he's completely pragmatic, not at all sentimental. He is possessive, in the sense that once a field or family comes under his purview, he's very reluctant to let it out of his grasp again. And while he tolerates a fair degree of disorder, provided the important work gets done, he's got a keen eye for the difference between a weed growing in a fallow field and one growing in the middle of his tended crops.

It's a distinction that's not intuitively obvious to lesser creatures. He can seem (and is) both arbitrary and ruthless. Yet still the refugees come, and in greater numbers, fleeing the massive battles of the remaining Champions. The fertile land (such as it is) of the Kreegill sustains as many as it can. The population overflows onto the plains around the ancient city of Codesh. Hamanu sets himself up in the lesser city of Urik, not too far from Codesh. Step by step, without conscious plan but always in accordance with sound agricultural principles, Hamanu creates the nuclei of his Templar Bureau.

The Cleansing Wars wind down at last after Ages of discord. One by one the Champions retire. Only Borys and Gallard continue their fight against the elves and dwarves (elves and dwarves having been, by far, the most numerous and dispersed of the Rebirth races Rajaat was determined to annihilate) and they have time on their side. In Urik, Hamanu dares to think of peace.

So long after the fact, Hamanu still marvels at his own naivete, in the end, chalking it up to youth; he was barely forty in the year of Desert's Fury when Rajaat summoned him to the Pristine Tower and, in the many-colored shadows of the Steeple of Crystals, reminded him that he was the *Final* champion, the Harrower of Humanity. When all the land empty (Rajaat says) the sea will come back, and the halflings, and all shall be as it was meant to be. Hamanu sees things a bit differently— the halflings bungled their world. There's no reason for humanity to give it back to them and certainly no reason for Hamanu to turn on his own kind. Though, Rajaat makes it clear that Hamanu could easily harrow humanity: the differences he's felt/suspected in himself vis-a-vis the other Champions mean that he wouldn't need an army to fight for him. His mere presence would be sufficient (and in this the compleat dragon metamorph is discussed and disclosed— with the implication that Borys was not compleat, not the way Hamanu would be compleat.)

But Hamanu wants nothing to do with Rajaat's plans for Athas— especially when Rajaat tells Hamanu how the two of them will insure that *next* time, the halflings don't make mistakes. Rajaat's not going to share power with anyone.

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Chapter Twelve

Third Person, intense internal viewpoint

Hamanu doesn't sleep much, it's one of those mortal foibles he lost when he first stood beneath the Dark Lens. Sometimes, though, when he's under a lot of stress, the habits of long ago reassert themselves. He grows weary and yearns to dream. The dreams of a Champion, a sorcerer-king, and a dragon are potent events in themselves, gathering up the entire city as it sleeps and setting it at the feet of the Lion-king— the god, if you will, of Urik who is depicted on its walls, its coins, and the medallions of its templars.

Hamanu himself isn't quite sure what to make of the Lion-king, whether it's an avatar of him or he's an avatar of it. Suffice to say, he first encountered it when he returned to Urik after that meeting with Rajaat. Since then he's seen it less than a hundred times— usually before he leads the armies into battle or when the city faces some other dire crisis— as it certainly does at this juncture.

There is no communication between Hamanu and the avatar— or, rather, there is no need for communication. In its rare presence, Hamanu's thoughts are the Lion-king's thoughts and vice-versa. Currently, they think about Ur Draxa, Borys' city, the place where Champions died, and the place where Rajaat was once (and is once again) imprisoned. Hamanu often adopts the guise of the Lion-king when he moves among his subjects, in his rare dreams, however, he becomes the Lion-king, striding over the land, over the silt and mountains, into the blasted city of Ur Draxa.

The ruins have been scoured by the intermittent, but torrential, rains of the Cerulean Storm. A wealth of mosses, ferns, and part-grown trees sprout on the black hillsides. A few hardy folk— survivors, perhaps, or pilgrims— dwell in the rich, rumbling land. Though no one dwells beneath the center of the storm, the vast lava-filled crater where Sadira immured the Dark Lens.

The farmers are no threat to Hamanu— if they even see his leonine form as he strides toward the lava-lake. Nor, for that matter, is he threatened by the ward-spells that Sadira left behind— it is night, after all, and though, by day, Sadira approaches the Champions in power, by night she is only a mortal sorceress, and not a very wise or experienced one, at that. If any of the Champions had wanted to free Rajaat or Tithian, they could have easily done so. But it remains in the best interest of the Champions— of Athas— to keep Rajaat imprisoned (since there's no reason to believe he can ever be definitively slain). And the Champions can draw their mana from the Dark Lens no matter where it is (after all, for a millennium, they didn't even *know* where it was).

Nevertheless, to Hamanu's skilled eye, there are serious problems here in moonlit Ur Draxa. The effect of all that turquoise rain on a lava lake cannot be what Sadira intended— or maybe she doesn't know much about soils and growing. (Hamanu's inclined to think that Sadira doesn't know much about anything, but that's another matter.) Whatever, it's clear that there's a crystal matrix— and obsidian crystal matrix (though that's something of an oxymoron— suffice to say that the shards back at Hamanu's palace come from here. Hamanu considers the possibility that his peers have also been here, or that somehow Tithian "showered" them on the other cities. Although it is possible that Sadira herself harvested them, and that she's the driving force behind the noose around Urik.

It doesn't take genius to perceive that Rajaat's halfling henchmen induced Sadira to stand in the transforming pool within the Steeple of Crystals, and that they transformed her as much and as far as they could without the pivotal Dark Lens. Hers was a flawed transformation— witness the nightly weakening of the ward-spells— but Rajaat had a millennium to plan for a new, Final Champion. And Rajaat was undoubtedly involved in Sadira's transformation. Rajaat would bestir himself against the Champions.

Rajaat and Tithian *both* bestir themselves when they sense that there's a Champion in Ur Draxa again. In different keys and with discordant harmonies, they cajole and threaten the erstwhile Final Champion until he senses the coming of dawn and the renewal of Sadira's spells.

Hamanu shakes his head and calls her a fool. (He has risked much to come here. These displays of magic— all wrought through his own command of the Dark Lens, exact their toll— although, if pressed, he believes he will have to draw

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b e y r u a r y : a m s e b

down more mana than he's drawn since the transformation to trigger the final metamorphosis). Athas cannot be ruled by committees, any more than Rajaat can be confined by a committee. She will know when it's too late, and she will bear the onus for the destruction of the Tablelands as he bears the onus for the destruction of the trolls.

(Note: somewhere in here (or before) Is Hamanu a dragon? Is a caterpillar a butterfly? Two forms of the same creature, each with different strengths, different powers. The caterpillar becomes a butterfly, but the butterfly can never become a caterpillar.)

Suffice to say: Two hundred years after the War-Bringer was imprisoned, a pall of unrelenting, stultifying boredom descended over the Tablelands.

R b R I I n o t e s . w p a d g e s e b
b e y r y : a m e s . w p a d g e s e b
r u a r y : a m e s . w p a d g e s e b

Chapter Sixteen

Third Person— intense, internal viewpoint

Boredom disappeared the day the Upstarts killed Kalak of Tyr, and the way things look from the upper balconies of Hamanu's Urik palace, the rest of Athas is likely to disappear tomorrow. Whatever consulting Sadira did with the almighty Council of Tyr, the upshot is another link in the tightening chain around Urik. The Lion-king's legions and reserves are spread in a thin line on the verge where irrigated fields gives way to barren wastes and badlands. As of this morning, there've been a few probing thrusts, but no major sallies against the line. The line can fall back; Urik *can* withstand a siege, even the loss of its ring of market villages would not be insurmountable (excepting Codesh, of course, at the other end of the Urik reservoir. But Urik cannot win—

Unless Hamanu takes the field himself, in which case, Urik might survive (because Hamanu would reap the armies arrayed against him, exactly as Rajaat had always intended), but *Hamanu* would not.

At high noon Hamanu gives the order for the reserves to fall back to the market villages. He tells Javed and the other regular commandants to order the regular legions to entrench on a redoubt due south of the city, due south of the main gates. Once those orders have been given, he sends the commandants, under a *geas* of immunity, out to the enemy encampments with word that the Lion-king will meet them south of Urik at dawn.

Dust-clouds billow throughout the afternoon as the armies rearrange themselves, but Hamanu remains in the palace. He's made his decision: for Urik— for *Athas*— he's prepared to gamble everything (Hamanu's never been much for gambling, except that farmers gamble against weather and every other sort of calamity whenever time they set seed in the ground.) The dust still billows when the sun sets and one may assume that there's still movement when the moons rise and Hamanu summons Pavek to the farmyard cloister.

A final dinner in the garden where Hamanu has reconstructed the Deche homestead of his distance childhood. His memoir, now-completed, rests on a table, several parchment scrolls wrapped in a length of plain, unbleached tussah. On another table, a dinner for two has been laid out. Pavek, the druid and high templar, arrives, fearful as always. Hamanu entrusts the scrolls to Pavek and informs him that he will not travel with the army to the appointed time and place.

Pavek will remain in Urik. Pavek will rouse the city's Guardian, who walks only when Hamanu is not present, and Pavek will evoke the Guardian with whatever power he and it possess to protect Urik. You will destroy me, Pavek, Hamanu commands.

You will destroy me, lest I set foot in my city again.

When Pavek protests, Hamanu assures Pavek that when the time comes, he will know the order is righteous. And, if Pavek fails— if the Guardian does not destroy the Dragon of Urik, why, then, the first person the dragon of Urik will seek, will be Pavek, and Windreaver will have a companion for eternity.

A mind-bender of Hamanu's subtle skill can read all the emotions in Pavek's mind at this point and is satisfied that Pavek will obey the order, even satisfied that Pavek, like Manu so long ago, will find a way to do what must be done. What surprises Hamanu— touches his beating heart— is that beneath all the fear, the piece of meat that calls itself Pavek will dare to mourn his passing. It is the vindication Hamanu has taken on faith, but now has in reality.

There will be a moment of true tenderness as Hamanu traces the scar on Pavek's face, commenting that Pavek truly should have had something done about it. He'd be a halfway handsome man with an unmarked face. Pavek should have asked. But Pavek wouldn't ask, won't ask even now; Pavek avers that he is what his life has made him: no illusions. There is agreement and peace.

They share the meal of ancient-style cooking— conjured foods of long-ago such as not even Quraite retains. At dawn, Hamanu prepares to leave Urik for the last time. Pavek wishes him good hunting and again, Hamanu is heart-touched: it might be better if he were defeated. Pavek demurs, then Pavek, unsolicited, says that Telhami will be waiting for him. Hamanu demands an explanation. In the end, there is only one Guardian, and Telhami is part of it. If the Guardian defeats Hamanu, then Hamanu will become part of the Guardian, and, therefore, Telhami will be waiting for him.

It is something Hamanu had not thought about— what might come *after* the Guardian. Hamanu leaves a gift for Pavek (what I don't quite know, except that Pavek, ever suspicious, does not immediately take it up) Then Hamanu departs.

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Chapter Seventeen

Third person— intense, internal viewpoint

At dawn, Javed and the other moral generals of the Lion-king's army beat their shields, saluting the overwhelming numbers arrayed before them. Then they point their weapons toward the sun, which seems to swell as it rises, then split into two distinct sphere, the larger of which rises swiftly to a zenith above the city. With cracks of crimson lightning, the towering gates of Urik open. Hamanu emerges in a chariot pulled by beasts of flame. For once, illusion makes him seem larger than he really is, and quite terrible in his beauty as he thunders to the forefront of his army. He accepts their salute, then trumpets sound a retreat.

Hamanu will face the might of the Tablelands alone . . . and decisively.

Under orders from invisible commanders, the massed enemy begins its charge. The air shimmers with the energy of psionic attack and a barrage of magical ordnance— all of which dies in mid-flight as the illusion that is Hamanu consumes the might of his enemies and rivals, growing larger, brighter as the dark sun descends and casts wraith-shadows across the field.

There is screaming and terror in the enemy ranks, but even that fades when Hamanu speaks: Behold your enemy. Behold your nightmare: The Dragon of Urik!

Hamanu's last spell: a furious, scintillating amalgam of fire and obsidian, as big as the sun and as bright, comes to fruition. Obsidian shards, bits of black-glass shrapnel (anach.) shower the field as the enemy host begins to writhe and shrivel. A tongue of flame connects Hamanu with his spell: a conduit of expended life, feeding, fueling a dread metamorphosis.

By the end of the afternoon, a rain of white ash floats atop the molten land where the battle was ``fought:" sand and obsidian (and fulgerites, there will have been a storm, not necessarily a Tyr storm, but surely during the battle the manic cries of the Usurper and the War-Bringer were heard by the dead and dying.)

When the moons rise again, a char-black figure— a figure to cast a shadow over the memory of Borys and the Dragon of Tyr— leaves the rampart, headed for the now-barred gates of Urik.

Hamanu, however, is free. Urik is safe. And in the classic *Sacre de la passage*, there's light spilling from a passageway beyond the Guardian, and, within the light the sounds of a waterfall, music, and a woman's laughter.

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Author Lynn Abbey speaks about her Dark Sun novels

Once in every while a little gem pops up on the Dark Sun mailing list, in this case Lynn Abbey author of *The Brazen Gambit*, *Cinnabar Shadows*, and the controversial *Rise and Fall of a Dragon King* from the *Chronicles of Athas* series by TSR. Here is what she said:

I hope I'm doing this right... I hope you'll all bear with me if I'm not.

I got the list address from a list subscriber I met at a convention last year. Until then, I had no idea that there was still such interest in the Dark Sun milieu -- or that anyone was reading my Dark Sun novels so carefully. It's quite an honor; I'm very flattered.

In fairness, though, it has to be said that the three Dark Sun books were not written during TSR's finest hours. The game department and the book department communicated primarily by rumor and although I would give the book department outlines that were roughly one-third the length of the finished book with the understanding that they would be reviewed and vetted by the game department, I never once got any feedback. (When it came time to do *Dragon King*, I was told that if I could write the novel in next 90 days, there'd be no need to get the gaming department's approval.)

The downside of all that freedom was that if I had a question about how the milieu worked, I could never get an authoritative answer -- so I would make things up. Sometimes I'd make things up that I was sure the game department wouldn't approve -- on the assumption that in disapproving the prose they'd have to answer my questions. This strategy never failed to backfire.

This is why I'm so honored (and surprised) that some of you seem to have enjoyed the books. You all have FAR more knowledge of Athas than I have or had. My reference materials were: the first boxed set, the psionicist's handbook, Troy Denning's Prism books, the hard-cover *Dragon-Kings* supplement, and (for Hamanu's biography) something called "Beyond the Prism Pentad".

Anyway, as I understand them, at least a few Athasian druids consider it their purpose and destiny to restore the Athasian wastelands. Philosophically, they have a lot in common with contemporary back-to-nature and Earth-First movements. They're not particularly tolerant of folk who don't agree with them and their standard of "right" and "wrong" is governed by whether an act will tend to bring a wasted area back to natural life. The druids I wrote about avoid places like mountains because mountains don't fit into their world view (because I thought there were a lot of contradictions in the reference materials that I had regarding the 10+ Guardians into which druidic characters were supposed to evolve).

I tried to imply that Telhami and her "congregation" might be considered heretical by other druids -- I was hedging my bets because I couldn't get the game department to answer my questions about druids in general... and I had questions about druids because I knew from the beginning that I was going to write about the dilemmas of a "good" man (Pavek) in a stable, but completely corrupt, society and I felt that druids offered a better contrast to the templars than any other "priestly" variant class.

(You can probably tell that I'm not much of a gamer. I started playing D&D before it had numbers and when all the rule books could be fitted into a rather small brown box. We played head-to-head, like poker, usually one PC (with 3

NPC assistants) versus the DM. We rolled for hit points, but everything else was negotiated, and you could never be smarter or wiser than you actually were. Needless to say, my group stopped gaming about the time AD&D came on the market... we went on to put together THIEVES' WORLD.)

Hamanu's story was a true roller-coaster ride. The only guidance I got from TSR was that, when the book ended, no reader should be able to tell what, if anything, had actually changed in Urik, or Athas-proper, because the milieu was going to be completely re-constructed. (I was told that the halflings were coming back in planet-killer space ships to do war with the Dragon-kings and recreate the Blue era. I thought that had zero potential for the sort of stories I like to write and my goal, when I began plotting the book, was to keep Urik safe from the game department and put Hamanu someplace where they couldn't mess with him.)

In order for Hamanu's story to work, he had to go up against a character who was more "evil" than he was... and that meant Rajaat, which meant Ur Draxa, the Gray, and the Black. It also meant trying to reconcile the material in "Beyond the Prism Pentad" with the Pentad itself... and without TSR's help. I managed to get a few maps of Ur Draxa, but I didn't know if they were "official", so I had to flood the place with sludge and fog to create believable confusion on Hamanu's part (since he should have known how the city was laid out and how it worked). I never did figure out the Black or the Gray; fortunately, Hamanu didn't understand them either, so it wasn't difficult to create believable confusion.

After I finished Dragon King, the game department did answer most of the questions I'd raised over the preceding years... naturally they answered them their own way, which contradicted much of what I'd laid out in my three books. There's is the "official" version, but I like to think that Hamanu's was the truth... at least as he understood it.

I know the old Lion of Urik would be pleased (but not surprised) to find that Dark Sun continues to exist on the Internet.

If anyone ever has questions about why things are the way they are in the books I wrote, I'll be happy to answer them -- I only hope you won't be too disappointed by my answers.

All for now... Lynn Abbey

Hi,

A few basic things you need to know. First, it's been quite a while since I was day-to-day immersed in DarkSun. I've relocated twice and my notes have gotten sketchier each time, so while I'll try to answer your questions honestly, today's answers might be different from the answers you might have gotten in 1995 or 1996.

Second, the Dark Sun years were not the brightest years for TSR. things were getting increasingly desperate within the corporate structure and desperation does not foster good communication. I had some input from the gaming side of the house for Brazen Gambit and Cinnabar Shadows, but Rise and Fall was written without any consultation with the gaming department...no, let me be honest and say it was written despite the gaming department. When I had questions, I had Troy Denning's novels, the basic box, a psionics handbook, the Dragon Kings supplement, and a poorly produced supplement that was supposed to translate Troy's novels into gaming terms. For the most part, then, I was on my own for the world building and making things up as I went. (The actual Rise and Fall deal was that if I could produce the book in less than nine weeks then the book department could bring it out without ever consulting the gaming department...it was part of a destructive civil war within TSR.)

So, your basic assumption -- that I was aware of what the GAMING department was doing with Dark Sun -- is wrong, especially for Rise and Fall. I never did fully grasp the difference between psionics and sorcery as the Sorcerer-kings manipulated them. I strove to have mechanics that were internally consistent for my own plots and (because the gaming department was never going to see the final manuscript) didn't worry over much about how they related to the game (which, I'd been told, was being overhauled into an SF setting with large numbers of technologically-advanced halflings coming back to Athas from their native planet...a scenario I found appalling.)

Now, as for the way Hamanu (and by extension the other wildly powerful npcs of the setting) used sorcery...as best I can recall, I messed around with the idea of obsidian with the idea that the dragon metamorphosis created living obsidian, which was, in and of itself, fuel for sorcery. Hamanu could suck the life out of anything, but usually he chose to suck the life out of himself (he was casually suicidal, among other things). Of course, the more he used himself as the fuel for sorcery, the further he progressed toward the mindlessness of a full-fledged dragon. Sorcery for Hamanu is still a lose-lose proposition: he could destroy himself or he could wreck Urik.

I'm not claiming that this structure works for the game, but it worked for the novels, and that's all I needed to care about. I truly expected the halflings-as-uber-aliens scenario to destroy the Dark Sun community and was just trying to finish Urik's story before that happened.

As to what happened to Sadira -- remember I was playing around with the powers of obsidian and the notion that Hamanu's "real" skeleton was being slowly converted to living obsidian. Hamanu thought the folks from Tyr were the greatest (and most dangerous) fools ever hatched because they confined Rajaat (a proto dragon) in lava which is nothing but potential obsidian, thereby giving Rajaat access to a virtually unlimited amount of sorcerous fuel. Hamanu and I also believed that Sadira didn't understand HOW her darkling magic worked. The way we understood it, when Sadira cloaked herself in shadow, she was effectively "borrowing" the same power that Rajaat had harnessed to make living obsidian. When Sadira and Hamanu confronted each other, and she attempted to use her

"power" she was, unbeknownst to her, attempting to draw on the very fuel contained within Hamanu's living obsidian bones...but Hamanu was an expert at denying and/or manipulating the use of that power. You could think of it as a feedback loop -- she was sucking power out of him, he had a conscious thought to reverse the process and sucked the power out of her instead. The only reason he didn't reduce her to ash was that he still hoped she would ally Tyr with Urik.

I honestly don't know whether what I did should be considered a "godlike" power. To me, it arose naturally from my initial "messing around" with living obsidian, which I don't think was ever a part of the Dark Sun canon, but which I needed to make my story work. Actually, I needed a lot to make my story work. I don't think that the DarkSun creators really thought through the mechanics of the Sorcerer-kings. As a group they were more like gods or natural (albeit willful and malevolent) forces in the world and the deeper the creators got into the mechanics the more they (like me) had to fudge things.

I'm secretly pleased, though, that Rise and Fall found a receptive audience in the Dark Sun community, since it was such a subversive, under-the-radar project. It remains one of my favorite books -- having Hamanu in my head day and night for nine weeks was a truly life-changing experience -- whenever the going gets rough, I drop into his mind set and plow forward.

I hope some of what I written helps you and the other regenerators... good luck. (And if you're ever bored, you might check out the THIEVES' WORLD books formerly from ACE and currently being published by TOR. After all, the only reason I got started in Dark Sun was because the TSR editors assured me I could write the Athasian milieu because it was THIEVES' WORLD with elves.)

Thanks for writing...

Lynn Abbey